

Pistons, Mavericks Seal Playoff Spots

TORONTO, April 2- NBA champions Detroit Pistons celebrated coach Larry Brown's return in style on Friday clinching an Eastern conference playoff berth with 97-84 win over the Los Angeles Clippers, Reuters said.

After missing 10 games due to complications from hip surgery, Brown was back behind the Pistons bench at the Palace at Auburn Hills as Detroit got double figure efforts from six players led by a 23-point performance from Tayshaun Prince.

Ben Wallace added 16 points and 13 rebounds while Richard Hamilton had 14 points and dished out 11 assists against the

injury-hit Clippers, who finished the game with just seven players.

Marco Jaric had 24 points for the Clippers and Elton Brand added 22 and 11 rebounds.

In Philadelphia, Dirk Nowitzki led the way with 29 points as the streaking Dallas Mavericks stopped the Philadelphia 76ers 100-83, to secure a Western conference playoff berth with their fourth consecutive win.

In Orlando, Gilbert Arenas nailed 31 points and Larry Hughes chipped in with 30 to power the Washington Wizards past the Magic 111-102, extending their unbeaten run to four

games.

In complete control the Wizards suffered a fourth quarter collapse as the Magic went on a 23-4 run to pull within five points with just over four minutes to play.

In Atlanta, Ricky Davis scored a season-high 36 points as the Boston Celtics crushed the last place Hawks 116-100 to break out of four-game losing skid.

In Charlotte, Chris Bosh had 27 points and nine rebounds and Jalen Rose added 23 points helping the Toronto Raptors to a 119-197 win over the expansion Bobcats for just their ninth road win of the season.

Schumacher Sizzling in Bahrain

SAKHIR, Bahrain, April 2- World champion Michael Schumacher hinted at a return to form for Ferrari by setting the fastest time in Saturday's first practice session for the Bahrain Grand Prix.

According to Sportinglife website, the German, who has just two points from

gave Red Bull fifth, just ahead of the second Toyota of Ralf Schumacher.

Rubens Barrichello sat out the session, as he will second practice, after a gearbox problem on his new Ferrari.

The Brazilian suffered the problem on Friday and

top of the timing sheets, just edging out the Toyota of Ralf Schumacher.

Narain Karthikeyan enjoyed a rare spell out front when he set the fastest time in his Jordan, although lap times were still significantly down on yesterday's best.

The Indian's time at the



Ferrari Formula One world champion Michael Schumacher of Germany gets out of the new F2005 after the first practice session for the Bahrain Grand Prix at the Bahrain International Circuit in Sakhir April 1. (Reuters Photo)

two races, has a new Ferrari car this weekend and showed its potential by setting a lap of one minute 30.552 seconds at Sakhir, the fastest of the weekend so far.

World championship leader Fernando Alonso was the closest to Schumacher's time but the Renault driver was over a second down.

McLaren's Pedro de la Rosa, filling in for the injured Juan Pablo Montoya, was third with Toyota's Jarno Trulli fourth. Christian Klien

his gearbox has been rebuilt, but Ferrari were unwilling to risk the unit prior to first qualifying later on Saturday with no spares available to them.

David Coulthard registered the 10th fastest time in his Red Bull, one place clear of Jenon Button's BAR-Honda.

The first 20 minutes of the session passed with precious few laps completed but at the halfway point a handful of leading drivers began to take the track.

Klien put his name at the

top was fleeing though as Michael Schumacher claimed fastest time before Toyota team-mate Jarno Trulli deposited him.

Button attempted to join the Toyota's at the front but he pushed too hard and ran wide at turn one, needing all of his car control to prevent his BAR from spinning. With three minutes to go Alonso set the quickest time as de la Rosa moved into second. But as the chequered flag waved, Schumacher clocked his best lap of the weekend so far to take the spoils.



Roger Federer from Switzerland celebrates his victory over Andre Agassi of the US during their semifinal match at the NASDAQ in Florida, April 1. (Reuters Photo)

Federer Downs Agassi to Reach Miami Final

MIAMI, USA, April 2- World number one Roger Federer ended Andre Agassi's hopes of a seventh Nasdaq-100 title with a 6-4 6-3 semi-final victory on Friday, according to Reuters.

The Swiss will meet Rafael Nadal in Sunday's best-of-five set final after he defeated fellow Spaniard David Ferrer 6-4 6-3.

Federer took one hour and 21 minutes to record his third win of the year over Agassi and his 21st victory in succession.

Federer, who won the Pacific Life Open title 13 days ago in Indian Wells, has been beaten once in his last 48 matches. His only defeat in that sequence came against Marat Safin in January's Australian Open semifinals.

"You can play a quality match but he has the ability, at any given moment, to play spectacular tennis," said Agassi.

The American held his own in some thrilling first set exchanges but lost his serve at 4-5 down.

At 3-3 in the second set Agassi began to apply some pressure of his own but Federer's serve held steady. It proved to be a turning point as the Swiss went on the attack, breaking Agassi in the next game and serving out the match.

"I did everything pretty well but I needed a few free points on my first serve today and didn't quite get those in the second set," said Agassi.

Nadal, instrumental in Spain's home Davis Cup triumph over the US in Seville last December, will face Federer in the biggest ATP match of his career.

All three of his career titles, including the Sopot title in 2004, have come on clay but none have been as prestigious or as lucrative as the \$3,450,000 Masters Series event in Miami.

Against Ferrer, the 18-year-old raced away with the first set, running up a 4-0 lead in just 20 minutes.

Only when he came to serve for a one-set lead did Nadal show any nerves but, having been broken at 5-2, he made no mistake when serving for it a second time at 5-4.

An early break of the Ferrer serve put Nadal in the driving seat in the second set and with the teenager's penetrating groundstrokes firing, Ferrer could do little to stop his compatriot's march into the final.

Bayern Munich Atop Bundesliga

BERLIN, April 2- Bundesliga leaders Bayern Munich could rest Brazilian defender Lucio and Peruvian striker Claudio Pizarro for the match against VfL Wolfsburg on Saturday in preparation for next week's Champions League clash against Chelsea, Reuters reported.

Bayern travel to London for the first leg of their quarterfinal against the English Premier League leaders on Wednesday and will not want to risk

any injuries.

Lucio and Pizarro, both normally first choices, were involved in South American World Cup qualifiers.

Goalkeeper Oliver Kahn and striker Roy Makaay missed Thursday's training due to slight strains after international action, although both are expected to be fit for the trip to Wolfsburg.

"It's a purely precautionary measure," coach Felix Magath said.

Paraguayan striker Roque Santa Cruz is still

recovering from a knee injury but influential midfielder Mehmet Scholl returns after a torn thigh muscle kept him sidelined for almost five weeks.

German captain Michael Ballack is fit and is set to play his 250th Bundesliga match.

Bayern have won five of their last seven trips to Wolfsburg, who are eighth in the league.

Wolfsburg are missing defenders Patrick Weiser and Facundo Quironga through injury.

Broadhurst Birdie Run Wins Share of Lead

CASCAIS, Portugal, April 2-Paul Broadhurst, of England, and Portugal's Jose Filipe Lima led the way at eight under par during the second round of the Portuguese Open.

According to the Independent, Broadhurst, a former Ryder Cup player who had his last European Tour victory in the 1995 French Open, hit five birdies in his second-round score of 66. Lima racked up seven birdies in 16 holes, but a bogey in the 18th hole meant he scored a 65.

Broadhurst was pleased that he had completely changed his fortunes in two days, and put some of his transformation down to good advice from his mental coach.

"Everything was going to the right in practice and I just couldn't see how I could get round the course, so I came in early before the first round to work on that. But my sports psychologist earned his money yesterday. He suggested I was getting too uptight and that was causing me my problems."

In calm, sunny conditions, England's Simon Dyson earlier in the day set a course record of 64 --with seven birdies and an eagle--but a bogey on the last kept him alongside his countryman Barry Lane on seven under. Three players--Argentina's Cesar Manasterio and the English pair Ian Garbutt and Stuart Little--were on six under.

Dyson's best European

Tour result came in Asia, where he topped the money list in 2000. Last year, he was leading the Asian Open for the first three rounds but wilted under an assault by the formidable Miguel Angel Jimenez to let in the Spaniard and have to settle for second-best.

Dyson is convinced he will pull off a win soon, and that this week could be his time.

"I know what's needed and I know I can do it and if I carry on playing like today I've got a decent chance," he said.

"It was disappointing to drop a shot at the end because I was in the middle of the fairway. I tried to hit a cut and it turned into a draw, but otherwise I played great and hit every fairway."

2-Match Ban On Chelsea Manager

LONDON, April 2-UEFA has banned Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho from the club's two most important games of the season, the Champions League quarterfinals against Bayern Munich, according to AP.

The European governing body accused Chelsea of bringing the game into "disrepute" and "making false declarations."

UEFA could have sanctioned Chelsea as strongly as it wished Thursday, including banning Chelsea from the competition or, at the other extreme, dismissing the charges.

UEFA also fined Mourinho SF20,000 (US\$16,700; 12,900 euros) and handed the Chelsea club an added fine of SF75,000. Assistant coach Steve Clarke and security official Les Miles were given reprimands by UEFA.

Mourinho did not attend the hearing. Chelsea chairman Bruce Buck, who represented the club before UEFA's disciplinary panel, said an appeal was unlikely. Chelsea had threatened to take the ruling to the Swiss-based Court of Arbitration for Sport if it were unsatisfied.

Unless the club appeals, Mourinho will have to watch the Bayern game from the stands and will be barred from contact with the team once it enters the stadium. The first leg is Wednesday at Stamford Bridge in London, with the return April 12 in Munich.

COCHIN, India, April 2-Virender Sehwag and Rahul Dravid struck fighting centuries as India posted 281 for eight from their 50 overs in the first one-day international against Pakistan on Saturday.

According to Reuters, the two shared in a 201-run stand of the third wicket, rescuing the hosts after they were reeling at four for two on a flat wicket in hot, humid conditions.

Sehwag cracked nine fours and three towering sixes in his explosive 95-ball 108 and Dravid had six hits to the fence in his 104 off 139 deliveries.

Pakistan, however, will still fancy their chances by restricting India to less than 300 on a wicket offering no assistance to the bowlers.

Sehwag, Dravid Centuries Boost India

The visitors got off to a great start, Rana Naved having Sachin Tendulkar (4) caught while hitting an awkward pull.

Saurav Ganguly, battling critics of his poor batting form, did not do much to strengthen his case. The Indian captain was bowled round his legs for a first ball duck as he shuffled across his stumps to flick.

Ganguly had averaged 9.6 in the three test series, which ended in a 1-1 draw on Sunday.

India could have been in deeper trouble with Sehwag leading a charmed life at the crease.

The opener was dropped first-ball by Mohammad Hafeez at point and then again on eight when wicketkeeper Kamran Akmal could not hold on to an edge off Mohammad Sami.

Sehwag made Pakistan pay for those lapses, batting sedately till he got to his 50 and then going after the bowling.

The 26-year-old pulled, cut and drove viciously,

racing from 50 to his seventh one-day 100 in just 29 balls.

He was finally bowled by Abdul Razzaq while trying to heave him across the line.

Wickets started to tumble once again after Sehwag's dismissal, Yuvraj Singh (16), Mohammad Kaif (7) and Mahendra Dhoni (3) falling to off-spinner Arshad Khan.

Dravid completed his 10th one-day century with a single to square leg but did not last for too long after that, run out to a direct hit by Sami while going for a quick single.

Arshad came back strongly from early punishment by Sehwag to finish with four wickets for 33 from six overs.